

PERCEIVED CULTURAL PERFORMANCE AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS IN GASTRONOMY FESTIVALS: A FUZZY-SET QUALITATIVE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LOCAL IDENTITY AND HERITAGE AWARENESS

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Abstract: The study aims to understand the concept of perceived cultural performance at gastronomy festivals, along with its coupling with local identity and cultural heritage to influence the behavioral intentions of visitors. For data collection purposes, a structured survey instrument was employed to obtain data from 544 domestic and foreign visitors who visited the two major gastronomy festivals, namely GastroANTEP in Gaziantep, Türkiye, and the Budapest Wine and Gourmet Festival in Hungary. In other words, the settings used here provide a cross-cultural foundation to examine the issue of gastronomic heritage in different kinds of festivals. Configurational design approach is used to avoid assuming a specific path towards the accomplishment of each outcome. Data have been analyzed using fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), which is an asymmetric approach for finding alternative combinations of conditions resulting in the same outcome. High behavioral intention and high perceived cultural performance are both considered to be focal outcomes of the configurational analysis. Six sufficient configurations have been found for behavioral intention; among them, the top three configurations show consistencies ranging from 0.962 to 0.969 and coverages ranging from 0.844 to 0.874, implying that there are alternative combinations of conditions that lead to high behavioral intention through the interplay of perceptions about cultural performance, local identity, and cultural heritage. Five configurations have been found in case of high perceived cultural performance, where the overall solution shows coverage value of 0.975 and consistency value of 0.905. Equifinality has thus been demonstrated, and none of the individual condition has been found to explain visitors' responses. The study adds to the literature in the domain of gastronomy and tourism by operationalizing the theory of cultural performance.

Keywords: gastronomy festivals, cultural performance, local identity, heritage awareness, behavioral intention, fsQCA

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INTRODUCTION

Gastronomy festivals are traditionally organized to promote local culinary cultures, attract tourists, and contribute to regional development. However, these events play more than a purely economic role; they also serve as significant stages for cultural staging and identity representation. Within these festivals, food functions not merely as an object of taste and nutrition but as a cultural actor that embodies social meanings, traditional codes, and symbolic expressions.

This perspective suggests that ritual, symbolic, and aesthetic dimensions are inherently embedded in the processes of preparing, presenting, and sharing food. In gastronomy festivals, culinary activities become an integral part of the performance itself; visitors do not simply taste food but also become spectators and participants in a cultural enactment. For instance, gestures in cooking demonstrations, decorative arrangements, background music, traditional costumes, and spatial designs transform food into a performative object (Long, 2004; Schechner, 2003). This performative dimension not only satisfies aesthetic expectations but also facilitates the reproduction of local identity and cultural heritage.

In the existing literature, studies on gastronomy festivals have predominantly focused on aspects such as destination image, visitor satisfaction, marketing impact, sustainability, and economic contribution (Carvache-Franco, 2025). For example, Carvache-Franco (2025) explored the relationship between motivation and revisit intention, analyzing visitors' behavioral intentions in festival contexts. While these studies provide valuable insights, quantitative analyses of how food is perceived as a form of cultural performance remain limited. At the same time, several studies have attempted to classify gastronomy festivals based on their relationship with cultural heritage. Trabskaya et al. (2015), in their study Gastronomic

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Festivals Based on Cultural Heritage, categorized European festivals according to their connections with heritage. In Türkiye, research such as *The Role of Gastronomy Festivals in Event Tourism* (Solunoglu & Orgun, 2024) has highlighted both the economic and cultural dimensions of such events.

However, although these studies emphasize the cultural component, they do not provide conceptual or quantitative models that directly measure how the ritualistic and performative aspects of food are perceived by festival participants. In this context, the purpose of this study is to conceptualize and empirically measure visitors' perceived cultural performance in gastronomy festivals, and to examine its effects on local identity perception, cultural heritage awareness, and behavioral intention through a structured quantitative model. In doing so, this research aims to reveal the cultural representational power of gastronomy festivals and to integrate performance theory into the field of gastronomy and tourism studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses the theoretical foundations of gastronomy festivals, focusing on Cultural Performance Theory, the cultural representational power of food, and the experiential dimensions of festivals as addressed in the literature.

Cultural Performance Theory

The concept of cultural performance, developed by Turner (1982) and later expanded by Schechner (2003), refers to a form of staging through which societies make their identities, values, and belief systems visible. According to Turner (1982), rituals are dramatic actions that reproduce a community's collective consciousness and provide cultural continuity between the past and the present. Schechner (2003), with his concept of "restored behavior," emphasizes that individuals and communities consciously re-enact cultural behaviors to express their identities performatively.

This theoretical perspective is particularly illuminating for understanding the nature of gastronomy festivals. These events are not merely commercial platforms for displaying food but also social arenas where cultural identity is performed and re-enacted (Bessière, 1998; Long, 2004). The acts of cooking, presenting, and sharing food become "ritual dramatizations" in the sense described by Turner. Thus, gastronomy transforms borrowing Schechner's words into a performance practice through which society "plays itself again."

Recent studies demonstrate that gastronomy festivals can be regarded as contemporary reflections of Cultural Performance Theory. The gastronomic experiences staged in these festivals are not only sensory consumption practices but also expressions of cultural meaning-making and local identity construction (Richards, 2020). Performative elements such as cooking contests, workshops, music, and dance performances foster a sense of belonging within a shared cultural framework. Consequently, gastronomy festivals emerge as hybrid public spaces—settings where local communities reproduce their identity and visitors encounter live cultural experiences (Getz & Page, 2020; Andersson & Mossberg, 2017). Furthermore, recent research conceptualizes gastronomy festivals as a form of experiential tourism, highlighting how performative acts within these events contribute to cultural sustainability (Solunoglu & Orgun, 2024).

The interplay of food, local rituals, and cultural symbols redefines destination identity for both residents and tourists. Particularly through the "storytelling through food" approach, gastronomy festivals are seen not only as tools for preserving the past but also as cultural performance practices projected into the future. This perspective allows performance theory to be revisited within tourism research, integrating experiential and identity-based dimensions (Richards, 2020).

Food and Cultural Representation

Food is not merely a biological necessity but also a carrier of cultural identity, belonging, and collective memory. Bessière (1998) and Long (2004) emphasize that local cuisines act as cultural narratives representing a community's identity. The ways food is prepared, the ingredients used, and the aesthetics of presentation reveal the historical experience and shared memory of a society. Gastronomy festivals provide the most intense setting for this representational power. For example, grape-crushing ceremonies at wine festivals or traditional mill demonstrations at olive festivals are not just production showcases but also symbolic cultural performances. Richards (2015) defines this process as cultural learning, where visitors, through gastronomy festivals, not only recognize local identity but also witness the transmission of cultural heritage. Hence, gastronomy festivals transform food from a consumption object into a medium of cultural representation. Recent evidence further shows that gastronomic heritage contributes to sustainable local tourism development by connecting local resources, identity, and visitor experience (Rivza et al., 2022).

Recent studies underline how gastronomic experiences function as expressions of identity and emotion. Everett (2019) conceptualizes food tourism as a "performance of identity through food", while Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016) demonstrate the multidimensional character of travellers' culinary-gastronomic experiences.

In this sense, food in gastronomy festivals serves not only as an object of taste but also as a symbolic language through which local values are staged. Visitors' modes of experiencing food through sound, scent, color, texture, and ritual create multisensory cultural interactions (Tran et al., 2024). Consequently, the boundaries between food consumption and identity expression become blurred, and gastronomy festivals turn into social arenas where identity is performed. Traditional foods, crafts, music, and performative presentations showcased during festivals act as living forms of cultural transmission for both local communities and visitors.

This elevates gastronomy beyond a representational practice into a performative domain of cultural continuity and social cohesion. Thus, gastronomy festivals not only safeguard heritage but also enable its reproduction and experiential sharing, positioning them as dynamic systems of cultural sustainability (Solunoglu & Orgun, 2024).

Experiential Dimensions of Festivals

Getz et al. (2010) identify the design and management of planned festival experiences and meanings as central concerns in festival research. Within this framework, gastronomy festivals represent one of the clearest forms of experiential tourism. Participants do not simply taste food; they engage in multisensory cultural experiences through aromas, music, stage performances, traditional costumes, and spatial design. This experience, paralleling Schechner's (2003) notion of "staging", transforms food into a performative act. Chang & Mak (2018) emphasize that gastronomic imagery is shaped through such symbolic representations, and visitors' perceived authenticity depends largely on how effectively organizers stage cultural performance. Consequently, experiential elements in gastronomy festivals strengthen destination image while deepening cultural identity transmission. Thus, gastronomy festivals function as complex cultural performances operating across the axes of experience, learning, and representation. Recent studies have examined gastronomy festivals within the framework of the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2019) and emotional engagement (Campos et al., 2022). Drawing on Pine & Gilmore's model, scholars argue that festival participants are not passive observers but co-creators of the experience. Visitors who join cooking workshops, explore local ingredients, and interact with local communities actively reproduce feelings of identity and belonging. In this sense, gastronomy festivals emerge as participatory performance spaces where consumers are integrated into the cultural production process.

Additionally, gastronomy festivals are increasingly studied from the perspective of sustainable experience design (Solunoglu & Orgun, 2024). Researchers highlight that experiential elements should not focus solely on pleasure but also foster cultural awareness and social responsibility. In this regard, the integration of music, staging, and gastronomic storytelling allows organizers to reinterpret the aesthetic dimensions of local culture while contributing to visitors' cultural learning processes. Consequently, gastronomy festivals serve as multilayered cultural experience environments that strengthen individuals' interaction with their cultural surroundings, integrating values of identity, belonging, and sustainability. Gastronomy can also influence the choice of cultural tourism destinations and deepen visitors' cultural immersion (Cordova-Buiza et al., 2024). Recent research contributes further to the understanding of festival experiences by showing that festivals in the realm of gastronomy create value in the form of a complex interplay between sensory, emotional, social, and meaning-based dimensions. A review of salient dimensions of memorable gastro-tourism experiences reveals that authenticity and sensory stimulation, togetherness and social interaction, local culture, aesthetics and servicescape, cognitive engagement, novelty and curiosity, and hedonic and eudaimonic well-being are among the salient dimensions (García-Pérez & Castillo-Ortiz, 2024). In the context of gastronomic festivals, Keskin et al. (2024) showed that festival quality is a significant factor in the creation of memorable food experiences and, through the mediating variables of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, enhances behavioral intentions.

Carvache-Franco et al. (2025) demonstrated that local food, socialization, entertainment, escape and novelty, and art are significant in loyalty for food festivals. These findings suggest that the experiential dimensions of festivals should be considered not only in their pleasurable form but also in their complex form in creating value. Contemporary research in the area also underlines that such experiential qualities are becoming integrated into the broader context of cultural representation and social sustainability. In terms of food tourism event research, for instance, there is evidence that the role of social sustainability factors can positively influence residents' quality of life, place identity, support for tourism, and prosocial effects, although the lack of interaction between the host and guest, as well as ambiguous tradition representation, can negatively impact the long-term value of festival experience (Agyeiwaah & Zhao, 2024; Thelen & Kim, 2024). In parallel, research into the communication of food festivals in Europe has found that intergenerationality, health, and food heritage are prominent narrative features in the development of the broader visitor experience and community value (Irimiás et al., 2024). Following such a research trajectory, Orea-Giner et al. (2026) argue that the main emerging themes in food tourism event research include cultural heritage, authenticity, bodily experience, governance, segmentation, and regenerative sustainability, while Elsayy et al. (2026) emphasize the role of involvement and satisfaction in terms of loyalty generation. In such a context, the contemporary festival experience can be seen as a holistic concept that encompasses the role of sensory pleasure, symbolic qualities, social interaction, local identity, and sustainability.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The primary aim of this study is to examine the effect of perceived cultural performance (as a prestigious yet accessible experience) on participants' behavioral intentions through local identity perception and cultural heritage awareness within gastronomy festivals. The study investigates how perceived cultural representations in gastronomy festivals shape participants' identity-based perceptions and behavioral tendencies.

Sample and Data Collection

The research sample consists of participants of two major gastronomy festivals: the Gaziantep GastroANTEP Festival in Türkiye and the Budapest Wine and Gourmet Festival in Hungary. These two festivals were purposefully selected because both Türkiye and Hungary possess rich gastronomic heritage and a strong emphasis on cultural performance. Data were collected between March and July 2025 through fieldwork conducted at both festival venues. Participants were selected on a voluntary basis among domestic and international visitors attending the festivals. Both face-to-face surveys and online questionnaires (via Google Forms) were used for data collection. A total of 544 valid questionnaires were analyzed. Of the respondents, 287 were female (52.8%) and 257 were male (47.2%). In terms of age, the majority were between 25–44 years old (58.6%), followed by 45 years and older (22.3%) and 18–24 years (19.1%).

Regarding education, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (63.4%), followed by master's (8.8%), doctoral (6.2%), and high school or lower (21.6%) degrees. In terms of income level, 48.7% of participants reported middle income, 39.5% high income, and 11.8% low income. These findings indicate that the sample primarily consisted of middle-aged, educated individuals with moderate to high income levels. A convenience sampling method was employed, considering the time and spatial constraints of accessing festival participants. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate after confirming their willingness to contribute. The demographic profile of the respondents is presented graphically in Figure 1 for improved visibility.

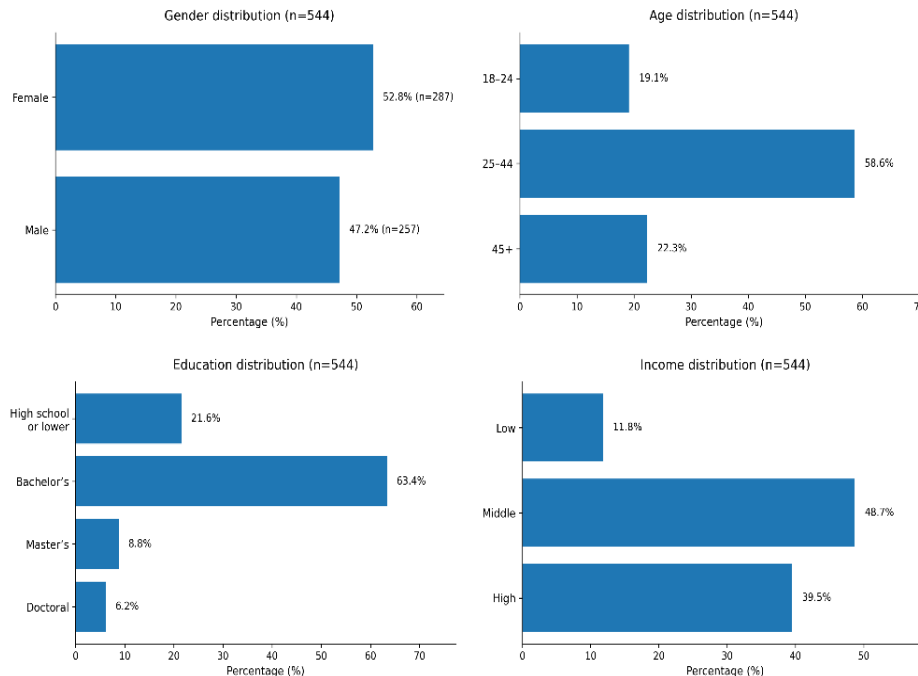


Figure 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Note: Values are reported as percentages; gender also includes frequencies (n)

Measurement Instruments

The questionnaire was adapted from validated and reliable scales used in previous studies. It consisted of two main sections: demographic information (age, gender, education, income, and nationality) and scale items measuring the variables included in the research model. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The measurement instruments used in the study are as follows:

- **Perceived Cultural Performance (PCP):** The main independent construct of the study, developed with reference to Turner (1982), Schechner (2003), Bessière (1998), Long (2004), and Richards (2015). It comprises four dimensions: Cultural Representation, Symbolic Meaning & Ritual, Aesthetic Performance, and Participant Interaction.
- **Local Identity Perception (LIP):** Adapted from Kim & Jamal (2007), this scale measures the level of identification with the destination and perceived connection to its cultural identity.
- **Cultural Heritage Awareness (CHA):** Developed with reference to UNESCO's (2003) Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and to the heritage protection and tourism development perspective discussed by Wang & Bramwell (2012). It assesses participants' awareness of and sensitivity toward intangible cultural heritage values.
- **Behavioral Intentions (BI):** Adapted from Zeithaml et al. (1996), this three-item scale measures participants' intentions to revisit, recommend, and maintain engagement with the festival or destination.

Together, these measurement instruments allow for a comprehensive evaluation of how perceived cultural performance influences visitors' identity perception, heritage awareness, and behavioral tendencies in gastronomy festival contexts.

In order to ensure the psychometric soundness of these measurement instruments prior to the main analyses, their validity and reliability were rigorously assessed through confirmatory factor analysis and internal consistency analysis.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the validity and reliability of the scales used in the study, namely Perceived Cultural Performance (7 items), Local Identity Perception (4 items), Cultural Heritage Awareness (7 items), and Behavioral Intention (3 items). For each scale, a single-factor model was tested, and all factor loadings were found to exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50. The internal consistency of the constructs was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which were found to be $\alpha = 0.889$ for Perceived Cultural Performance, $\alpha = 0.887$ for Local Identity Perception, $\alpha = 0.966$ for Cultural Heritage Awareness, and $\alpha = 0.940$ for Behavioral Intention. Since all alpha values were well above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, the results indicate that all measurement scales demonstrate a high level of internal consistency, reliability, and a unidimensional factor structure.

Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA)

In this research, the Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) method was employed to analyze the data and achieve the study's objectives. This method explains causal relationships among variables through multiple configurations, providing deeper insights into the relationship between Perceived Cultural Performance (PCP) and Behavioral Intentions (BI). The fsQCA approach integrates fuzzy-set and fuzzy-logic principles with classical QCA methodology, allowing for a more realistic modeling of complex social phenomena (Ragin, 2008). Unlike traditional binary methods that treat variables as either "present" or "absent," fsQCA allows variables to assume graded membership scores ranging from 0 to 1, thus offering a more nuanced representation of multifaceted social realities.

In tourism and gastronomy research, the fsQCA method has gained significant traction in recent years (Xu & Chen, 2026). Some researchers have applied it alongside Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Xu & Chen, 2026) or Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) (Valaei et al., 2019). The analysis was conducted using fsQCA 4.1 software, following the analytical procedures proposed by Pappas & Woodside (2021). In the first step, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated for all variables (PCP, LIP, CHA, and BI). Then, the data were calibrated between 0.95 (full membership) and 0.05 (full non-membership), with 0.50 defined as the crossover point. This calibration process transformed the raw data into fuzzy-set values, enabling comparative analysis across cases. Subsequently, a truth table was constructed to identify the logically possible configurations of the causal conditions.

Configurations with a frequency lower than 3, a consistency score below 0.80, or a proportional reduction in inconsistency (PRI) value below 0.70 were excluded from further analysis in order to avoid contradictory sufficient conditions. Following Ragin's (2008) recommendation, the intermediate solution was adopted as the primary analytical model, as it offers greater explanatory power and interpretability compared to complex or parsimonious solutions. Finally, sufficient configurations (causal recipes) leading to high levels of Behavioral Intentions (BI) and Perceived Cultural Performance (PCP) were identified. These configurations reveal multiple causal pathways (equifinality) through which participants' cultural experiences, identity perceptions, and heritage awareness in gastronomy festivals collectively shape their behavioral intentions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, the Fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) method was applied to identify the combinations of criteria (causal configurations) that lead to the expected outcome variable. Accordingly, all dimensions included in the research model were incorporated into the analysis.

The main objective of the study was to explore how different combinations of Perceived Cultural Performance (PCP), Local Identity Perception (LIP), and Cultural Heritage Awareness (CHA) influence the presence or absence of Behavioral Intention (BI). Furthermore, the study also examined which sets of conditions contribute to the emergence of Perceived Cultural Performance (PCP) itself. Based on this analytical framework, four separate models were developed to evaluate the causal relationships between the variables and their outcomes, as follows:

Model I: $BI = f(PCP, LIP, CHA)$

Model II: $\sim BI = f(PCP, LIP, CHA)$

Model III: $PCP = f(LIP, CHA, BI)$

Model IV: $\sim PCP = f(LIP, CHA, BI)$

Each model was examined to determine the consistency and coverage values of the resulting causal configurations. These metrics indicate the degree to which specific combinations of conditions are sufficient for producing the expected outcome and the extent to which these configurations explain the observed cases.

Descriptive statistical analysis revealed that the mean values of the constructs ranged between 4.27 and 4.39, suggesting that participants generally held positive perceptions toward the cultural and experiential dimensions of gastronomy festivals. Following calibration and truth table construction, the fsQCA results provided evidence for multiple causal pathways (equifinality) through which the presence of high levels of perceived cultural performance and behavioral intention can occur. The results demonstrate that no single variable alone is sufficient to explain the outcomes; rather, it is the interaction among perceived cultural performance, local identity, and heritage awareness that determines visitors' behavioral tendencies. Specifically, combinations of high perceived cultural performance and strong identity and heritage awareness were found to produce high levels of behavioral intention. Conversely, the absence of cultural performance and identity perception contributed to lower behavioral intentions.

These findings reinforce the view that gastronomy festivals function as performative spaces of cultural experience, where visitors' perceptions of authenticity, local identity, and heritage collectively shape their behavioral outcomes. The fsQCA approach, by uncovering such asymmetric causal patterns, provides a deeper and more context-sensitive understanding of how cultural and symbolic elements operate in festival experiences.

These models were developed to reveal the asymmetric (non-symmetric) relationships among participants' cultural perceptions, identity constructs, and behavioral intentions within gastronomy festivals.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the study. These statistics served as a reference for determining the cut-off points applied in the fsQCA calibration process.

According to the findings, the mean values of the variables ranged between 4.27 and 4.39, while the standard deviations fell within the range of 0.82–0.90. These results indicate that participants generally showed high levels of agreement with the scale items and expressed positive perceptions toward gastronomy festivals.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Perceived Cultural Performance (PCP)	4.316	0.841
Cultural Representation (REP)	4.332	0.812
Symbolic Meaning & Ritual (SYM)	4.298	0.866
Aesthetic Performance (AES)	4.285	0.854
Participant Interaction (PAR)	4.349	0.823
Local Identity Perception (LIP)	4.274	0.895
Cultural Heritage Awareness (CHA)	4.391	0.879
Behavioral Intention (BI)	4.347	0.901

The results also indicate that participants in the sample perceived gastronomy festivals not merely as culinary events, but as cultural performance spaces. The relatively high mean scores (above 4.0) suggest that participants strongly experienced the festivals' dimensions of cultural representation, symbolic meaning, aesthetic value, and interactive participation. These findings support the appropriateness of using a 0.50 threshold value in the fsQCA calibration process and demonstrate that most variables exhibited distributions close to full membership (0.95).

Accordingly, participants perceive gastronomy festivals as arenas where local identity is reproduced, cultural heritage is performed, and social interaction takes place. This overall pattern, when interpreted alongside the fsQCA results presented in the following sections, suggests that the influence of cultural performance on behavioral intention occurs not only through direct effects, but also through multiple causal configurations.

Table 2. Necessary Conditions (BI)

Conditions Tested	Presence of Outcome: BI		Absence of Outcome: ~BI	
	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage
Perceived Cultural Performance (PCP)	0.918	0.927	0.598	0.540
~ Perceived Cultural Performance (PCP) (~PCP)	0.542	0.601	0.916	0.905
Local Identity Perception (LIP)	0.932	0.920	0.601	0.516
~ Local Identity Perception (~LIP)	0.506	0.582	0.910	0.924
Cultural Heritage Awareness (CHA)	0.927	0.915	0.590	0.511
~ Cultural Heritage Awareness (~CHA)	0.512	0.593	0.905	0.914
Behavioral Intention (BI)	0.935	0.931	—	—

As shown in Table 2, each of the conditions—Perceived Cultural Performance (PCP), Local Identity Perception (LIP), and Cultural Heritage Awareness (CHA)—exhibits a high level of consistency (consistency > 0.90) in relation to the presence of Behavioral Intention (BI). This finding indicates that these variables constitute necessary conditions for the formation of behavioral intentions. Conversely, the absence of these conditions (~PCP, ~LIP, ~CHA) also demonstrates high consistency values (approximately 0.91) for the absence of behavioral intention (~BI). This symmetrical pattern, consistent with the logic of fsQCA, reveals that the presence of specific cultural conditions strengthens behavioral intentions, while their absence contributes to the nonexistence of such intentions.

Table 3. Necessary Conditions (PCP)

Conditions Tested	Presence of Outcome: PCP		Absence of Outcome: ~PCP	
	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage
Local Identity Perception (LIP)	0.936	0.911	0.606	0.532
~ Local Identity Perception (~LIP)	0.517	0.593	0.902	0.926
Cultural Heritage Awareness (CHA)	0.942	0.926	0.610	0.540
~ Cultural Heritage Awareness (~CHA)	0.528	0.607	0.914	0.931
Behavioral Intention (BI)	0.949	0.934	0.599	0.525
~ Behavioral Intention (~BI)	0.521	0.595	0.921	0.939

As presented in Table 3, the conditions of Local Identity Perception (LIP), Cultural Heritage Awareness (CHA), and Behavioral Intention (BI) each demonstrate high consistency values (consistency > 0.93) in relation to the presence of Perceived Cultural Performance (PCP).

On the other hand, the absence of these conditions (~LIP, ~CHA, ~BI) is also found to be highly associated with the absence of perceived cultural performance (~PCP), with consistency values ranging between 0.91 and 0.93. This finding suggests that the perception of cultural performance emerges in conjunction with identity and heritage dimensions, and that the lack of these cultural components significantly weakens performance perception.

Table 4 presents six core configurations that explain Behavioral Intention (BI) among gastronomy festival participants. Combinations of high Perceived Cultural Performance (PCP), Local Identity Perception (LIP), and Cultural Heritage Awareness (CHA) exhibit high consistency values (consistency > 0.93) in relation to the presence of behavioral intention. The strongest solution configurations (S1, S2, and S3) demonstrate high solution consistency (0.962–0.969) and coverage values (0.84–0.87), effectively explaining the emergence of behavioral intention.

Table 4. The Configurations Analysis (BI)

Solutions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6
Perceived Cultural Performance (PCP)	●		●		⊗	●
Local Identity Perception (LIP)	●	●	⊗	●	●	⊗
Cultural Heritage Awareness (CHA)	●	●	●	⊗	⊗	●
Behavioral Intention (BI)	●	●	●	●	⊗	⊗
Raw coverage	0.874	0.861	0.844	0.429	0.437	0.421
Unique coverage	0.019	0.010	0.004	0.001	0.003	0.002
Consistency	0.962	0.958	0.969	0.931	0.938	0.945

These results indicate that visitors' behavioral intentions in gastronomy festivals are characterized by a structure of equifinality; that is, different combinations of identity, heritage, and performance conditions can lead to similar behavioral outcomes. This finding highlights the configurational and multidimensional nature of behavioral intention formation, emphasizing that cultural experience and identity-related perceptions jointly shape visitors' engagement with gastronomy festivals. Table 5 illustrates the combinations of conditions that lead to the emergence of Perceived Cultural Performance (PCP) in gastronomy festivals. The analysis results show that configurations characterized by high levels of Cultural Heritage Awareness (CHA) and Local Identity Perception (LIP) (Configuration S3) serve as strong determinants of PCP (consistency = 0.957; raw coverage = 0.914).

Table 5. The Configurations Analysis (PCP)

Solutions	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5
Local Identity Perception (LIP)	⊗		●		⊗
Cultural Heritage Awareness (CHA)	⊗		●		●
Behavioral Intention (BI)	●	●	●	⊗	
Raw coverage	0.503	0.489	0.914	0.462	0.439
Unique coverage	0.016	0.003	0.421	0.001	0.001
Consistency	0.941	0.969	0.957	0.953	0.939

Moreover, Behavioral Intention (BI) frequently appears as a core condition within these configurations, indicating that the perception of cultural performance is reinforced not only cognitively but also behaviorally. The overall solution coverage (97.5%) demonstrates the high explanatory power of the model, while the solution consistency (0.905) confirms that the identified condition combinations reliably and consistently lead to the outcome.

CONCLUSION

This study makes a significant contribution to the literature by conceptualizing gastronomy festivals not merely as economic or touristic events but as cultural performance arenas. For the first time, Turner's (1982) and Schechner's (2003) Cultural Performance Theory has been quantitatively integrated into a model that explains the symbolic, aesthetic, and ritual dimensions of food within gastronomy festivals. Through this approach, the study positions gastronomy not solely as a practice of consumption, but as a cultural act of identity, heritage, and representation.

Furthermore, the research advances the concept of Perceived Cultural Performance (PCP) by introducing an empirical measurement framework and analyzing its influence on Local Identity Perception (LIP), Cultural Heritage Awareness (CHA), and Behavioral Intention (BI) through multiple causal configurations (fsQCA). By doing so, the study moves beyond the predominantly univariate and linear models common in gastronomy festival research and adopts an asymmetric, configuration-based causal approach. In this regard, the study provides a new methodological perspective for the gastronomy and tourism literature by empirically capturing the experiential and behavioral effects of cultural performance, bridging theoretical insight with quantitative modeling.

The findings of this study indicate that the success of gastronomy festivals is not solely determined by their economic outcomes, but is directly related to the ways in which cultural performance is staged and represented. Accordingly, the following recommendations are proposed for festival organizers, local authorities, and destination marketing organizations:

Firstly, it is important for the local culinary components to be considered as much more than mere food displays; they must be viewed as performance art shows which are driven by stories, music, costumes, and space design in order to improve their performing atmosphere during festivals.

Secondly, it is important to engage local producers, chefs, artists, and citizens in order to ensure the festival's ability to promote social cohesion and cultural heritage.

Thirdly, it is crucial for the experience of festivals to be environmentally and culturally sustainable in order to preserve and pass on the genuine local culture values.

These implications emphasize that gastronomy festivals should be regarded not only as touristic products, but also as instruments of cultural sustainability and identity transmission, contributing to the long-term socio-cultural vitality of destinations. This study has certain limitations. First, the research data were collected from only two festivals—GastroANTEP in Gaziantep, Türkiye, and the Budapest Wine and Gourmet Festival in Hungary; therefore, the generalizability of the results is limited to other destinations. Future studies conducted across different geographical and cultural contexts will be essential for testing the external validity of the proposed model.

Second, the data were obtained through a self-report survey method, which may be subject to perceptual bias arising from participants' subjective evaluations. To address this limitation, future research could employ qualitative data collection methods such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, or visual ethnography to gain deeper insights into the cultural and symbolic dimensions of performance.

Finally, the cross-sectional design of this research restricts the ability to observe how perceptions of cultural performance and behavioral intentions evolve over time. Future longitudinal and cross-cultural comparative studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of gastronomy festivals in cultural sustainability and identity construction.

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Data Availability Statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical considerations.

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